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SUBJECT: FRENCH ATTENDANCE AT LIBERIA PARTNERS FORUM

REF: STATE 201818

1. (U) We passed the information about the February 13-14 Liberia Partners Forum to our contacts in the French Finance and Foreign Ministries. At the MFA, our contacts lauded USG plans to host the Forum, but regretted that a timing conflict with the biennial Africa-France summit of heads of state in Cannes would almost certainly impede FM Douste-Blazy, Minister Delegate for Cooperation & Development Girardin, or MFA AF A/S-Equivalent from traveling to Washington. Our MFA contacts have pledged nonetheless to continue efforts to identify an appropriate and substantive French delegation for the Liberia Partners Forum.

2. (U) On December 27 Interim MFA West and Central African DAS-Equivalent Francis Blondet provided an update that former IMF head Michel Camdessus would likely represent France at the Liberia Partners Forum. Camdessus, who is now a Counselor to President Chirac, would likely be joined by Pierre Andre Wiltzer, the High Representative for Security and Prevention of Conflicts, as well as Ambassador Xavier Darcos, the French Permanent Representative to the OECD.

3. (U) MFA AF PDAS-Equivalent Caroline Dumas and Acting DAS-Equivalent for West and Central Africa Francis Blondet have underscored to us the French commitment to Liberia, noting in a December 13 meeting that France just gave Liberia 1 million euros through GEMAP, and plans to open an embassy in Monrovia in 2007. They hope the Partners Forum will encourage greater IMF flexibility, with Blondet expressing concern that Liberia's debt burden could otherwise force it to mortgage its natural resources.

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